MASS. EA32.2:T 68/2

Traps, Trapping and Furbearer Management in Massachusetts

GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS COLLECTION
OCT 23 1998
University of Massachusetts
Depository Copy
UMASS/AMHERST
312066016589425

The Commonwealth's Position

People have been utilizing wildlife in North America for food and clothing for over 11,000 years. The Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (MDFW), which has a long, successful record of protecting, enhancing and restoring the state's wildlife populations, strongly supports the continued use of the Commonwealth's renewable natural resources through the regulated harvest of wildlife. The Division also strongly supports trapping as an important method of harvesting wildlife. Trapping is essential to furbearer management and wildlife research, and is of considerable economic and social value to many households in Massachusetts.

Furbearing Animals are Abundant

Fourteen species of furbearers are legally and commercially harvested by the public in Massachusetts. The populations of these species are scientifically managed and secure. None are threatened or endangered. Furbearing animals can be found throughout the state, even in areas with high concentrations of people. Some species of furbearers, such as raccoon and coyote, are more abundant now than at any other time in history.

Trapping is Highly Regulated & Monitored

The MDFW is the state agency with legal authority to pass laws governing wildlife resources in Massachusetts. The Division has a mandate to protect and conserve all wildlife in the Commonwealth. State environmental police officers enforce trapping laws and regulations throughout the state. Over 42 laws and regulations govern trapping within Massachusetts, including:

- Mandatory licensing of trappers.
- Mandatory trapper training.
- Restrictions on the size of traps.
- Restrictions on the types of traps.
- Mandatory, regular checking of traps.
- Restricted trapping seasons.
- Restricted areas for trapping certain species.
- Mandatory tagging of traps with name and address of trapper.

The MDFW's professional wildlife biologists monitor furbearer populations, and conduct and supervise scientific studies to ensure that these species are managed properly. In addition, research focused on the traps themselves identifies which traps work best to capture each species, and which need improvement. New and improved traps are continually being developed and evaluated.

Trapping has Benefits for Society

Wildlife Management: Trapping is an important component of wildlife management programs. It is the most feasible and effective method to control wildlife population growth. Regulated trapping, conducted free of charge by trained, licensed members of the public, is used by wildlife professionals to regulate wildlife populations. Regulated public trapping reduces negative aspects associated with high wildlife populations. For species that cause substantial property damage, such as muskrat, beaver and raccoon, trapping reduces property damage and other related problems for homeowners, farmers and businesses. This damage can be extensive and severe when wildlife populations become too high.

Property damage and habitat destruction caused by high wildlife populations are significant within Massachusetts. The following examples of wildlife problems and management needs illustrate some of the reasons why public trapping is a critical part of the Commonwealth's comprehensive wildlife management program:

(over)

• Depredation by coyotes on sheep, lambs, and goats are increasing statewide; in suburban areas coyotes have begun to kill and maim cats and dogs.

• Massachusetts is the leading cranberry producer in the United States. Muskrat damage to cranberry bogs costs the growers hundreds of thousands of dollars in damages annually. Over 79% of cranberry growers rely on commercial muskrat trappers to reduce this damage.

• Damage caused by the dam-building and tree-felling activities of beaver is significant. In Massachusetts, over 119 towns have sustained damage to their roadways caused by beaver flooding. Highway workers respond to over 1,600 incidents of beaver flooding annually.

• If regulated beaver trapping was discontinued today, the beaver population would triple in just three years, rising from its current level of 24,000-28,000 animals to over 60,000. Beaver damage to roads and highways would expand to approximately 30,000 incidents per year, costing taxpayers several million dollars annually. Other types of damage, including flooding of domestic drinking water wells and municipal water supplies, septic system backups and general property flooding, would also increase dramatically.

• Several rare and endangered species, including the Piping Plover, Least Tern and Roseate Tern, suffer significant nest predation by foxes and coyotes, inhibiting the recovery of their populations. An inability to trap local predators could seriously hamper restoration efforts.

• Research efforts by scientists trying to determine the welfare and status of species such as river otter, bobcat, coyote and foxes depend on trapping, particularly the use of new soft catch traps, as the only effective means to capture these species alive and unharmed. Capture is required to instrument these animals with radio-collars: the only effective way to track and gather information on individual animals. This information is needed in developing appropriate management programs for these species.

• Information derived from trapper harvests is an important component in many furbearer management programs; used to determine population trends, sex and age ratios, environmental contaminants, and other data of great importance in monitoring and conserving furbearer populations.

Life Style: Many people in Massachusetts maintain and enjoy close ties to the land and the seasons. Members of many households go afield on a regular basis to harvest and gather the renewable wildlife resources that are products of our lands and waters. These include fish from our streams and ponds, mushrooms and ferns from our forests and glades, maple syrup from our trees, and deer and furbearers from our swamps and forests. Regulated trapping is part of the annual cycle and provides important outdoor experiences for many households in the state. Massachusetts citizens annually spend tens of thousands of person days afield harvesting native furbearer resources. For many, trapping is a valued family tradition, passed down from one generation to the next. Trapping has important social and cultural values to many people across the state.

Economics: Trapping is a source of income for many families in the state. The flesh of furbearers is consumed by people and their pets, the pelts are used to make clothing, and the glands and other animal parts are used to make perfumes, scents and water repellent products. For some households, harvested furbearer pelts provide significant income. Annually, furbearers harvested in Massachusetts bring up to $2 million in income into households throughout the state. Over one-third of trapping households utilize furbearers as a food source for themselves or their pets. Trapping services and trapping privileges are also used in bartering for goods, services and products. Regulated trapping also provides direct economic benefits to furbuyers, fur processors and others employed in the garment industry. Nationally, Massachusetts furbearer harvests contribute to a $1.2 - $1.8 billion industry.

The Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife has a mandate to protect and conserve all of the Commonwealth's wildlife resources. The Division promotes public understanding and appreciation of natural resources, as well as the scientific management and conservation of those resources. Regulated trapping promotes the appreciation and understanding of wildlife on several different levels, and is an important component of the wildlife management programs that have ensured the restoration and continuing success of our furbearer populations. If you would like further information please contact *Furbearer Management Program*, Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, Field Headquarters, Westborough, MA 01581